WEST AFRICAN URBANIZATION: PATTERNS OF CONVERGENCE OR DIVERGENCE?

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Introduction

Urbanization, however defined, is generally accepted as an important force in shaping the social, economic, and physical environment of the contemporary world. A recent World Bank sector paper on urbanization details some of the recent trends and impacts of urban growth at the global scale.[1] Despite its acceptance as a major force in affecting contemporary affairs, the process of urbanization is not fully understood and debate continues over its nature, significance, and future.

Part of the difficulty arises from a confusion of two broad concepts of urbanization. The first, basically a demographic concept, defines urbanization as a process of increasing density, size, and heterogeneity of settlements. In this concept urbanization takes place as the number and size of settlements increase.

The second concept, focusing upon the social consequences of such concentration, sees urbanization as a force which generates changes in social values, social norms, and life styles. This phenomenon has been referred to as urbanism. What is the nature of the relationship between these two concepts? Does one necessarily imply the other? Can there be urbanization without urbanism or vice versa? The evidence is conflicting and thus the debate continues.

Adding to the difficulty of understanding the nature of urbanization is the fact that it has not only been linked to urbanism as a way of life but also to other major changes in socio-economic organization such as

the process of industrialization. A large number of studies have been completed which focus on the significance of the relationships between these various elements which together make up the complex process of urbanization.

While the question of the link between urbanization, urbanism, industrialization, and development generally is of academic interest, more importantly an understanding of those linkages clearly contains important policy implications. In this regard different observers looking at urbanization in various countries and at different times have characterized it as hyper-urbanization, over-urbanization, under-urbanization, and have variously described it with such phrases as the ruralization of cities or the urbanization of the country side.

Divergent or Convergent Paths?

The problems of understanding the nature and direction or urbanization has led a number of students to investigate the process through comparative analysis. However, as the data began to accumulate on a world wide and comparative scale the questions became more complex rather than lending themselves to any simple and rather neat answers. In a recent attempt at synthesizing the broad literature of comparative urban studies, Brian J.L. Berry has concluded that in Third World countries there are different processes of urbanization at work distinct from that which affected either Western Europe or North America.[2]

Berry feels that his observations and study of the current literature indicate that the unique cultural, social, and political attributes of Third World countries result in essentially distinct processes and patterns of urbanization. Berry thus characterizes the process of Third World urbanization as diverging from traditional western patterns which emerged in earlier periods and states that these differences transcend any superificial similarities which might be found with cities in the developed world.

> Thus, what I do in this book is to disavow the view that urbanisation is a universal process, a consequence of modernisation that involves the same sequence of events in different countries and that produces progressive convergence of forms. Nor do I subscribe to the view that there may be several culturally specific processes, but that they are producing convergent results because of underlying technological imperatives of modernisation and industrialisation. I feel very strongly not only that we are dealing with several fundamentally different processes that have arisen out of differences in culture and time, but also that these processes are producing different results in different world regions, transcending any superficial similarities. (Berry, p. xii)

The thesis posited by Berry requires closer inspection in various parts of the Third World. The vast scope of his work and the limitations placed on him by the publishers, did not allow detailed empirical analysis. This is unfortunate, because it means that the validity of the thesis must be determined on scant evidence. Unfortunately, Berry chose to use nine valuable pages (of a total of forty-one devoted to Third World urbanization) to discuss Israel and South Africa — hardly typical examples of Third World urbanization.

The purpose of this paper is to consider Berry's thesis in terms of its relevance for West Africa. While a more detailed study is being prepared, we limit the present discussion to some of the broad generalizations made about Third World urbanization in Berry's book. Our notion runs counter to that outlined by Berry, suggesting that the process of urbanization affecting West Africa is not unique to that region. Moreover, the similarities of urban growth and urban structure between various Third World countries are not seen to be "superficial" but in fact basic to an understanding of urbanization as a global process.

At the outset of our argument we contend that urbanization as it affects West Africa is tending to produce "convergent paths", creating urban institutions and in some cases urban spatial structure, which are becoming more, not less, similar. We also contend that the general mechanism for instituting such change is to be found in the operation and extension of what Wallerstein has termed, "The Modern World System."[3]

In arguing our case, we do not deny that many of the observations made by Berry are indeed correct. We accept, for example, that the initial socio-cultural, political and economic milieu of Third World nations differ, often radically, from those in other areas. We also agree that certain aspects of urban form and structure (and thus function) in Third World cities are quite different than those observed in either contemporary or historic patterns of urbanization elsewhere.

We, therefore, begin with some of the same observations made by

Berry -- that is, Third World societies often have different initial conditions and that, at least, some of the resultant forms are different. However, we do not agree that this necessarily implies the operation of "several fundamentally different processes." We suggest that contemporary urbanization is a much more universal process, operating at a global scale, and, as such, is affected by many of the same forces.

In order to illustrate this point, we might ask, "Is it possible that the same process, operating on different initial conditions, can result in different outcomes?" Despite the obvious difficulties involved, we might offer an analogy drawn from the natural sciences. The general process we wish to consider is that of fluvial erosion of landscapes. The process of erosion by water is fairly well understood. Well established empirical relationships have been formalized between the relevant variables. Yet this same general process, operating upon diverse initial conditions, produces results as varied as the rolling plains of Iowa, the Bad Lands of the Dakotas, and the highly disected hill country of Western Pennsylvania. Not because the process differs, but because the underlying conditions of bedrock, amount and timing of precipitation, and a wide variety of other conditions differ.

We suspect that much the same thing is true of the urbanization process. The central issues in the process of urbanization relate to questions of location and proximity and the resulting economies of agglomeration, economies of scale, and urbanization economies generally. The process of

urbanization involves the desire for proximity among individuals, groups, institutions, private and public enterprises, etc., whether for economic, social, military, political, or other reasons.

At this general level, all urbanization can be seen to derive from this same basic process of agglomeration. However, at another level, we could suggest that the forms, institutions, spatial structure, etc., might differ radically between societies. Indeed, this has been the case where urbanization has developed in response to societal needs. And there would be no reason to expect that the resulting urban agglomeration would be similar except in the sense of being denser and somewhat larger than surrounding settlement patterns.

However, the pattern of urbanization has not been one of isolated development in diverse regions, but rather one of penetration into relatively isolated societies and economies associated with the expansion of the "modern world system," centered upon Western Europe and North America.

The Modern World System

In contrast to Berry's conclusion concerning the existence of several distinct processes leading toward divergence in the path of urbanization and development in different world regions, a large and growing body of literature is stressing the importance of international linkages in controlling the direction of development. This literature, largely initiated by Latin American social scientists with Marxist perspectives, is generally included

under the rubric of "dependency theory."[4] Some of the essential characteristics of dependency theory are summarized in the following comment by Wallerstein:[5]

> The structure of the world economy as a single system has come increasingly in recent years to be analyzed in terms of a core - periphery image, an image which has been linked with the discussion of "dependence." And thus it has been argued, for example, that Third World countries are not "underdeveloped" nations, but "peripheral capitalist" nations. This is far clearer terminology, but it leads unfortunately to further confusion if the unicity of the world system is not borne clearly in mind. Ikonicoff argues, for example, that peripheral capitalist economies "operate by economic laws and growth factors [that] are clearly different from those of the economies one might call the model of classic capitalism." This is only so because our model of "classic capitalism" is wrong, hence both in the sixteenth century and today the core and the periphery of the world economy were not separate "economies" with two separate "laws" but one capitalist economic system with different sectors performing different functions.

John Friedmann and Robert Wulff in a recent review of the literature entitled, The Urban Transition, have attempted to summarize the cogent points of dependency theory as it applies to urbanization.[6]

> Basically, it involves the notion that powerful corporate and national interests, representing capitalist society at its most advanced, established outposts in the principal cities of Third World countries essentially for three related purposes: to extract a sizable surplus from the dependent economy, chiefly in the form of primary products, through a process of "unequal exchange"; to expand the market for goods and services produced in the home countries of advanced monopoly capitalism; and to insure stability of an indigenous political system that will resist encroachment by ideologies and social movements that threaten to undermine the basic institutions of the capitalistic system. (p. 14)

The outcome of this process of development is described by Friedmann as a spatial structure characterized by a core and a periphery which are linked together in a dominant/dependent relationship. Friedmann and Wulff have suggested that:

> . . . at whatever scale of analysis -- international, national, or regional -- core and periphery stand, by definition, in an asymetrical relationship of dominance/dependency that is articulated through four major spatial processes: decision making and control, capital flows, innovation diffusion, and migration. (p. 12)

Related to each of these processes is a resulting spatial pattern. The relationships between process and pattern are shown in Table I.

Table I

The Relationship Between Spatial Process and Spatial Pattern

	Process		Pattern
(i)	Decision Making and Control	(i)	Spatial Distribution of Power
(ii)	Capital Flows	(ii)	System of Activity Locations
(iii)	Innovation Diffusion	(iii)	Modernization Surfaces
(iv)	Migration	(iv)	Settlement Patterns

Source: Friedmann and Wulff (1974).

Much of the more recent geographic literature on African development has tended to concentrate upon the last two processes, that is innovation diffusion and migration, and their resulting spatial patterns, modernization surfaces and settlement, although they are perhaps the least important of the process variables.

One may well question the implication of Berry's work that the "divergence" arises out of the workings of different cultural and socio-political systems and the scant attention he pays to the importance of the international system of linkages which exist. The urban systems of the Third World are not "closed systems" in any sense. They are in fact linked to the operation of import/export firms both large and small, the operation of international, financial, and other institutions, whether governmental, quasi-governmental, or private. It might be noted that in respect to the general pattern of development Schiavo-Campo and Singer suggest that "it is unrealistic today to discuss the economic development of an individual country taken in isolation without taking into account the international feedback effect."[7]

Thus, urbanization is not a process which is confined to individual national entities, but rather an international process which affects all nations, tied together through political and economic linkages. Thus, in a sense, it is not accurate to speak of "African Urbanization" except in the narrow sense that urbanization is occurring <u>in</u> Africa, for the process which leads to the establishment and growth of urban centers is clearly not limited to Africa. Nor do we need to view African urban growth as some distinct process. To look for the "solution" to the "problems" of African cities by focusing attention upon <u>only</u> the conditions in Africa is to miss this fundamental point regarding the urbanization process -- that it is a global process and that in part, the problems of African cities derive from

the nature of linkages, both past and present, which bind African development, or underdevelopment, to that modern world system.

Murphey provides us with a most interesting and useful example of the way in which the roles of Chinese cities changed under the impact of western penetration. In an article entitled "The City as a Center of Change: Western Europe and China" he outlined the way in which the basic function and structure of European and Chinese cities differed during periods of relative independent development.[8] He notes that the cities of Western Europe performed as centers of trade and commerce and were the centers of social and political change, which only later diffused out into a relatively more conservative and economically less developed hinterland. In contrast to this the cities of China remained primarily the seats of administration which served to maintain the status quo and never played a major role as social and political innovators. This role of Chinese cities was maintained so long as the political-cultural environment of imperial China was left relatively undisturbed by outside influences. But once China was pulled into the international network of trade, there were fundamental changes which took place in the function and form of those cities. Murphey suggests the impact that such international trade has had upon some of the major port cities. "Shanghai has never performed any administrative functions outside its own metropolitan limits and it may be for this reason that it did not dominate the Delta until Western Entrepreneurs largely took over its development."[9] He goes on further to note that "the accelerated impact

of the West on China during the 19th century has by the 20th century set in train profound changes and it is natural to find that these are also reflected in the cities role."[10]

In short, the relevant variables are the extent to which the Third World city will be drawn into and become an integral (albeit peripheral) part of the "modern world system." As the strength of the ties to that modern world system increase, a pattern of general convergence may be seen even though the specific forms of urban structure may continue to be different, shaped and molded as they are by local conditions of society, polity, and economy.

The African Urban Inheritance.[11]

The dependency literature, and the review provided by Friedmann and Wulff are particularly attractive because of their usefulness in explaining many features of West African urbanization.

To properly understand the contemporary map of urban Africa, one must understand the nature of colonialism and neocolonialism. The impact of these processes upon the structure of contemporary Africa may be seen at the regional, national, and local scales.

Colin Rosser has provided an overview of the process of urbanization in tropical Africa in a contribution to the Ford Foundation International Survey of Urbanization.[12] In that review Rosser notes that Africa is in fact one of the least urbanized of continents. The population of tropical Africa is

still overwhelmingly rural with large segments of the population engaged in agricultural pursuits. Since that is indeed the case, why then the concern with urban growth? It is precisely because of the growing significance of urban centers and the increasing rates of urban growth. Several of the African urban centers are numbered among the world's fastest growing, despite the fact that national economies have not kept pace with such growth. The contemporary map of Africa is marked by a clear pattern of regional inequalities in which wealth and population are increasingly being concentrated in a few "development islands."[13] Outside of these development islands lie large areas connected to, but deriving little benefits from, the urban "islands." The development of this pattern stems directly from the experience of colonialism, and is a relatively recent phenomenon.

At the turn of the century perhaps only one city, Ibadan, had a population of more than 100,000. In less than 60 years, there were 57 such cities, the majority being located in West Africa (32). By 1970 at least two cities had passed the million mark -- Greater Lagos and Kinshasa. In addition, five other centers including Ibadan, Dakar, Accra, Addis Ababa, and Nairobi had populations of over 500,000. Thus, the growth of these cities is primarily a twentieth century phenomenon.

African urban centers, like all others, reflect the particular economic/political/cultural environment in which they develop and the functions they are expected to perform. Despite the existence of some precolonial cities in West Africa, most African cities reflect their origin as part of a <u>colonial</u>

economic and administrative structure.[14]

Where they existed, traditional urban patterns have been overlain by a colonial pattern. Nor is this process peculiar to Africa. In fact, it is characteristic of urban developments in other areas of the Third World which have been subject to colonial exploitation.

As Friedmann and Wulff point out:

> Constructing broad generalization about third world cities is always a hazardous business. Yet, if a single fact stands out, it is that cross cultural studies of urban land use have consistently reported the existence of a "dual city." These colonial cities as McGee has called them, owe their dualistic structure to the intrusions of Western capitalism into forms of traditional culture. Existing side by side, and only weakly interrelated, both "modern" and traditional cities display their own morphological patterns and residential behavior. (p. 53-54)

The phenomena noted by Friedmann and Wulff has been observed by writers throughout the Third World. However, whereas earlier writers commented on the differences between the two sectors, recent writers have begun to comment on the growing importance of the linkages between the two. The first authors to focus attention upon the inadequacies of the dualism thesis began to comment on "dualism within dualism" or "urban intradualism." Recently, some students of Third World urbanization are calling for a complete re-evaluation of the dualism thesis. Thus Milton Santos suggests that,[15]

> " . . . one must refuse to accept the concept of urban dualism in describing and interpreting what goes on in the economy of cities of underdeveloped countries."

This re-interpretation of the dualism thesis argues that there are strong and growing linkages between the "formal" and "informal" sectors of the urban economy. The increasing importance of the relationship between these sectors is seen as evidence of penetration of the market economy into formerly traditional sectors of the economy.

Thus, despite the fact that the "formal" sector is highly concentrated in the principal cities (Table II), linkages are being established with the non-formal sector in an expanding periphery.[16] As the non-formal sector becomes more closely tied, and dependent upon the formal sector, the effects of international linkages become more widespread.

Table II

Percentage Share of Manufacturing in African Capital Cities

Dakar (Senegal)	87%
Bathurst (Gambia)	100%
Conakry (Guinea)	50%
Freetown (Sierra Leone)	75%
Monrovia (Liberia)	100%
Abidjan (Ivory Coast)	63%
Accra (Ghana)	30%
Cotonou (Dahomey)	17%
Lagos (Nigeria)	35%

Source: A.L. Mabogunje, (1973) "Manufacturing and the Geography of Development in Tropical Africa," Economic Geography, Vol. 49, p. 11, Table 3.

The degree to which convergence may be seen to exist, or the rate at which convergence is occurring, is dependent upon the pace of institutional

change and institutional transfer (even if modification occurs). Most central in this process, is the mechanism whereby land is allocated to particular uses. The number and variety of land allocation mechanisms is great and clearly are related to local cultural and political structures. But while great variety may exist, several distinct types of mechanisms may be recognized.

The allocation of land to particular uses in Yoruba land, for example, is related to the way land is viewed in the particular system of land tenure. One can identify at least three categories of land tenure among the Yoruba.[17]

1. Public lands, those given over to use for the palace grounds, other public buildings, the markets, shrines as well as agricultural lands and sacred areas.
2. Land allotted to families and individuals by traditional rulers. In many cases, the landholder does not have permanent claim to the land and if he ceases to use the land it may be reallocated.
3. Unallocated land, which is community owned over which permanent rights have not been acquired.

The idea of a land market is alien to West Africa, yet it is generally becoming an important feature of urban areas. Indeed, many of the foreign consultants, planning firms, representatives of international financial institutions, or representatives of aid agencies, point to the lack of such a land market as one of the primary obstacles to improving urban conditions

in West Africa.

A recent UN publication entitled Urban Land Policies and Land Use Control Measures (Vol. 1. Africa) makes the following point in its introduction:[18]

> Although most African countries do not face the problem of high population densities as in Western Europe and parts of Southeast Asia, several reasons make it imperative for African countries to adopt urban land policies. First, with cities growing at the fastest rates ever recorded in the present century, the scramble for urban land among various competing land uses has intensified. This scramble is giving rise to poor land management, misuse and abuse of land. Indeed, the scramble would not be necessary if there were an urban land market to regulate land distribution. The structure of land market, however, is burdened with customary land holding practices which impede land transactions. In several instances, urban land prices have been so inflated that over fifty percent of urban families cannot afford to buy plots, let alone shelters. No doubt, there is no easy way to regulate the urban land market and to control land use without an urban land policy.

In a later section of the report the author writes that:

> In summary, the clouded and unmarketable land titles, the juxtaposition of "imported" land law with customary land law, the relatively undeveloped urban land market and clogged channels of real estate financing are among the major bottle-necks hindering the systematic development of urban land. These problems do not defy solutions, provided that land tenure systems are modernized to facilitate transactions and legal registration of titles and governments take risks to establish real estate financial institutions.

Such arguments for the "rationalization" of the land market, have led governments to attempt registration of land, formalization of sales, and establishment of real estate institutions. The operation of such competitive land markets, yielding the "highest and best use" (at least theoretically) is

a major force in developing convergent paths of urban form.

Convergence in urban form will be accomplished, at least to some degree, by the adoption of several specific institutional frameworks and strategies of urban planning. These include:

(i) planning methodologies and instruments carried over from former colonial administrations,

(ii) current attempts to "rationalize" the urban land market, principally along lines established in North America or Europe, and

(iii) continued reliance upon foreign planners and consultant firms.

The importance of such observations is that divergence is not the order of the day, but divergence from the patterns of the past must be consciously strived for -- to do otherwise is to witness increased convergence, with all the connotations of "urban problems" associated with western urbanization. This is perhaps the strongest argument for planning and land use control in Third World countries, because a laissez faire attitude to urban development may recreate the mistakes of past urban forms.

Planning as an Intervention Strategy.

If we accept the thesis that a common process of urbanization is at work in West Africa, to what extent can the process be controlled in order to meet broader societal needs of any one nation? It is our contention that given the development patterns in the world at the present time, increased urbanization will be a natural outcome of socio-economic forces.

If we accept the inevitability of that process under present conditions, then the planning function is not one of attempting to serve predicted demands but rather of determining what planning strategies are necessary to meet specific goals and objectives as they relate to urban areas in West African countries.

It is clear that in many Western European and United States cities the planning function was viewed merely as facilitating urban growth and development. For example, with environmental concerns at the forefront and emerging concern for public participation in the planning process, planning agencies in the United States are becoming aware that goal formulation was a necessary precondition to effective planning. Thus, the question becomes not only one of preparing for urban growth and development, but analyzing the nature of such growth and making overt decisions as to what kind of urban growth and change is acceptable or desirable.

Similarly, if in fact the processes of urbanization are common in most national settings, planning should and must take the perspective that its purpose is to intervene in the process in order to assure outcomes consistent with national and local objectives. This notion presupposes that our knowledge of urbanization processes is sufficient to allow intervention strategies which can indeed produce desired outcomes. While this assertion could well be the subject of much debate, the only alternative is to allow urban patterns to evolve and initiate remedial action when necessary.

In the sense that industrialization, urbanism, and urbanization are

intertwined, the planning function must be coordinated at all levels of government and deal directly with social, economic, and physical phenomena. Planning as an intervention strategy must rest on clearly stated objectives as regards the maintenance of cultural values, levels and distribution of economic development, as well as preservation and overall improvement of environmental quality. Each of these issues may be higher or lower on any one country's agenda, but national and local leaders must clearly articulate objectives if planning is to be an effective mechanism for facilitating their attainment.

The basic drive for economic development in most Third World countries will most likely create the conditions for increasing urbanization with larger and larger urban concentrations. Such issues as urban containment policies, population distribution policy, economic development, and maintenance of traditional values are related and cannot be dealt with in isolation.

Conclusion.

The importance of understanding the degree of convergence or divergence is a critical matter of policy. At present we would argue that it is essential that the urbanization of West Africa be seen as part of a larger process of development; many critical elements of which are quite similar both in their intent and in their impact. The extension and intensification of a pattern of international linkages will lead toward an increasing degree

of convergence in the urbanization patterns of the world cities. It should be noted that the convergence is more a result of the "logic" of urbanization than of the particular "form" of urbanization. The importance of this is that unless specific policies are inacted, often in what appear to be non-economical or suboptimal decisions, the logic of the current process of urbanization will lead to increasing concentration, a continuation of rural to urban migration, land pressure and resulting speculation in urban areas, and continued difficulty in providing adequate employment, housing and infrastructure.

Thus the role of planning becomes critical, once the process of contemporary urbanization is understood, if African countries are to develop urban strategies that differ in any fundamental sense from the patterns centered upon and diffusing from the North American/European core.

Footnotes:

1. World Bank, Urbanization: Sector Working Paper, 1972.

2. Berry, Brian J.L., The Human Consequences of Urbanisation (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1973).

3. Wallerstein, Immanuel. The Modern World System (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

4. Useful references to this literature may be found in Anthony R. de Souza and Philip W. Porter, The Underdevelopment and Modernization of the Third World (Association of American Geographers, Resource Paper No. 28, 1974); John R. Friedmann and Robert Wulff, The Urban Transition: Comparative Studies of Newly Industrializing Societies (Los Angeles, UCLA Comparative Urbanization Studies, 1974); and Edward Soja and Richard Tobin, "The Geography of Modernization: Paths, Patterns, and Processes of Spatial Change in Developing Countries," in Garry D. Brewer and Ronald Brunner (eds.) Political Development and Change: A Policy Approach (New York: The Free Press, 1974).

5. Wallerstein, Immanuel. "Dependence in an Interdependent World: The Limited Possibilities of Transformation within the Capitalist World Economy," African Studies Review, Vol. 17, No. 1 (April 1974) pp. 1-26.

6. Friedmann and Wulff, op. cit.

7. Schiavo-Campo, S. and Hans Singer, Perspectives of Economic Development (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1970).

8. Murphey, Rhodes, "The City as a Centre of Change: Western Europe and China," in D.J. Dwyer (ed.), The City in the Third World. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1974).

9. Ibid, p. 55.

10. Ibid, p. 62.

11. This section draws upon the material in Colin Rosser, Urbanization in Tropical Africa: A Demographic Introduction. (The Ford Foundation, International Urbanization Survey).

12. Ibid,

13. Green, L.P. and D. Fair. Development in Africa, (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1961).

14. McNulty, M.L., "African Urban Systems, Transportation Networks and Regional Inequalities," African Urban Notes, Vol. VI, No. 3 (1972).

15. Santos, Milton, "Economic Development and Urbanization in Underdeveloped Countries: The Two Flow Systems of the Urban Economy and Their Spatial Implications," Unpublished paper, University of Toronto, 1972.

16. Mabogunje, Akin, "Manufacturing and the Geography of Development in Tropical Africa," Economic Geography, Vol. 49.

17. This section draws on material from the United Nations, Urban Land Policies and Land-Use Control Measures, Vol. I. Africa (New York: United Nations, 1973).

18. Ibid., p. 1 and 22.